

# Learning Communities Research and Practice

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## Notes on this Issue

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## Notes on this Issue

### Abstract

Engagement and community stand in dialectical relationship to each other: As engaged learning community practitioners, we build community—in our learning communities and through our scholarship—that fosters engagement among our students and our colleagues.

## Notes on this Issue

In her Editor's Notes for Volume 6, Issue 1, Emily Lardner handed editorship of *LCRP* over to us. Although somewhat intimidated by the prospect of trying to fill Dr. Lardner's very large shoes, we were excited by the opportunity. As we have worked with journal authors these past few months, and read about their inspiring work in learning communities across the country, our commitment has deepened to the forum that co-editors Emily Lardner and Gillies Malnarich established back in 2013. We thank Emily for her years of leadership, which has helped to establish learning communities as a scholarly discipline in its own right, and for inviting us to continue the work of growing our global community of research and practice.

The articles published in *LCRP* attest to the transformative effect that learning communities can have on students, faculty, and campus culture. We witnessed this firsthand on our own campus, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY, where our learning communities began as a grassroots faculty project and grew to become a signature initiative and decades-long success story. The development of our learning community program was the result of collaboration, not just between faculty members but also among individuals working in offices across the college—Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, the Registrar, and multiple academic departments. And research showed that students succeeded. As more and more faculty, staff, and administrators saw how learning communities engaged students, they themselves became more engaged in their efforts to develop and refine the program. So engagement begets engagement. In this issue, we offer three articles that take student engagement as their starting point.

In “Launching Integrative Experiences through Linked Courses: The Future Educators Learning Community (FELC),” Jamie Brown, Holly Hoffman, Kristina E. Rouech, and Elizabeth A. VanDeusen report on the implementation of learning communities as a vehicle for increasing peer-to-peer connections among education students at Central Michigan University. Their work speaks in particular to practitioners who may be in the early stages of developing learning communities on their campuses in an effort to promote student engagement. The authors name three themes that they found were central to the successful implementation of the Future Educators Learning Community—communication, collaboration, and flexibility—and reflect upon ways they might refine their learning community model to continue to promote learning in their classrooms.

George A. Hill and Paula L. Risolo, in their research article “An Analysis of Learning Outcomes in a Freshman Seminar Learning Community that Utilizes Peer Mentoring at a Community College,” cite evidence that student persistence correlates not only with their engagement in academics, but also in campus social activities. Based on this, and citing other evidence showing that community college students tend to devalue out-of-class activities, the authors look to increase student engagement through peer mentoring.

Gerard A. L'Heureux, a science instructor at Holyoke Community College, found linking science and literature courses to be a refreshing and vital shift from typical STEM courses in which instruction tended to involve “little or no student participation.” His

perspectives piece, entitled “A Learning Community Retrospective Integrating Science and Literature,” explores ways that reading and writing about poetry, fiction, and drama, as well as topics in such disciplines as chemistry, physics, and biology, engaged both students and professors. By inviting inquiry that turns to issues beyond scientific method and theory, L’Heureux argues, learning community participants can be encouraged to see science and the humanities as part of a coherent whole.

While the learning community model has been well established as a means for providing quality educational experiences, we are still discovering what, specifically, serves to foster engagement in our learning community programs. The articles in this issue point to some key features that practitioners in the field have explored. In our tenure as editors of *LCRP*, we invite you to continue this exploration with us. As the work in this journal continues to demonstrate, community and engagement are in a dialectical relationship with one another—it is through engagement that community is built, and it is through community that engagement grows. Thank you for contributing to our growing community of practice through your teaching, learning, and scholarship.